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BOSTON UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE INFLUENCE OF THE POETRY OF EDMUND SPENSER
UPON THE POETRY OF JOHN MILTON

By

Claribel May Nothnagle

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Approved

by

First Reader . *George M. Sneath* .

Professor of *English*

Second Reader. . *Thomas R. Mather* .

Professor of *English*

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PART ONE
REASONS AND PROOF OF INFLUENCE

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Scholars commonly assert that Edmund Spenser, the great poet of the Elizabethan Age, exerted influence upon John Milton, the Puritan poet of the next century. The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a study of this influence, the reasons for it, and the kind and the extent of it.

Although Spenser's work undoubtedly did have its effects upon Milton, the question of how much it effected him is greatly debated. If the influence, as this paper will attempt to prove, is profound, Milton's greatness is, in part, due to Spenser. This debt to Spenser need not detract from our esteem of Milton, for he was able to recognize the universal, timeless qualities in his predecessor and utilize them in his own way and to his own advantage. This ability helps to determine his greatness, for a lesser man could not have made such an achievement; the greater the amount of influence, the greater Milton's task, for to turn the qualities he valued in Spenser to his own use required skillful and true interpretation, initiative, and originality. Milton was not an imitator.

If we can trace wherein he was influenced, we can find out some of those qualities he recognized. The fact that he was able to use them successfully in his austere Puritan Age, the very antithesis of Spenser's Age, proves their

universality and timelessness.

In making the study contained in these pages, the reasons why Milton was influenced by Spenser are listed first. These reasons explain the common grounds of disposition, incident, and belief on which they were able to meet across the years.

Secondly, proof that the influence exists is given by the testimony of authorities and of Milton himself. These testimonies are to show that the influence is such that it cannot be discounted or ignored, and that, if Milton recognized it, he certainly did not presume that it detracted from his greatness.

The influence in thought content, structure, and wording is then successively traced. These all have a bearing on each other and are interrelated, but, for the sake of clarity, are divided accordingly and without defeating the purposes of this paper.

To date Edwin Greenlaw has made the most extensive study of Spenser. With Charles Osgood and Frederick Padelford he has edited the Spenser Variorum which gives, as far as it has been completed, the text of Spenser's work with complete analysis, references, and comparisons. Harris Fletcher's Milton: Complete Poetical Works is edited with good notes and suggestions as to influences affecting and affected by Milton in each poem. Greenlaw has also written two articles about

Spenser's influence on Milton in Studies in Philology. These deal almost entirely with influence on thought. The Milton Handbook, by James H. Manford, and The Spenser Handbook, by H. S. V. Jones, name parallel descriptions and parallel incidents of plot in the two poets. There are numerous other less important sources on the subject.

In this study I have attempted to draw together the various influences of Spenser and Milton as suggested by these authors, and found by a close perusal of the poets' work, and amplified by new discoveries of my own. Because of the nature of the paper, most of the material is drawn directly from Spenser's and Milton's works.

CHAPTER TWO

REASONS FOR INFLUENCE OF SPENSER ON MILTON

Spenser and Milton are commonly represented with Chaucer and Shakespeare as the four most outstanding figures in English literature. Since Spenser lived during the sixteenth century and Milton during the seventeenth, is it not natural that Milton should be influenced greatly by his predecessor, for what poet might not learn by means of studying those who were poets before him, particularly those of great ability? No one can deny the genius of Spenser, and Milton certainly recognized it. Yet it must be remembered that Milton was himself a genius, or he would not stand out with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Spenser in equal rank. Had he been influenced so greatly by Spenser that he merely imitated, he could not be called original. Spenser had talent, originality, imagination, and superior intellect expressive in its own unique form, and therefore produced work unlike anyone else's in its essential qualities. How far may an author be influenced then, and still retain his originality? How far did it go in the case of Spenser and Milton? If we can answer this question, we can answer the preceding one.

I have suggested that Milton accepted Spenser's influence because he recognized his greatness. Yet for this

reason he was influenced by Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Malory, Virgil, Chaucer, and numerous others. For other reasons the influence of Spenser predominated.

First, the natures of the two men were similar. Both were extremely sensitive -- sensitive to beauty, feeling ecstasy at its manifestation and setting it up as an idol of truth and virtue. Both were sensitive to wrong, quick to lash with stinging words at the evils existing in society and politics. They were sensitive to life and took its disillusionments hard; they were sensitive to music, to rhythm, to everything aesthetic and lovely. Linked with their sensitivity is their imagination, --powerful, pictorial, splendid. Both had stern will power, high ideals, and great ambition, combined with a high seriousness and tenacity of purpose. Two such similar natures would, of course, have much in common.

In men of like natures similar events would very likely produce similar thoughts and ideas. There are many parallels in the lives of Spenser and Milton, which make a bond between them. A man's life, directly or indirectly, affects his work. The events of life affect his thoughts and emotions, and it is his thoughts and emotions which come forth on paper.

Spenser and Milton were both born in London. John Spenser, Edmund's father, was not a Londoner but he settled there to become a free journeyman of the Merchant Taylor's

Company. Removal from coventry to city employment is typical of the age, for with the coming of a new impetus, that of the Renaissance, into England, trade grew and flourished, companies were formed, and industry expanded. There the little boy grew up amid the hustle and bustle of a new, exciting age. He met Sir Philip Sidney there, and DeSelincourt tells us that in the December Eclogue of The Shepheard's Calendar "there is no local color that might not have been drawn from the country that lay at the gates of London."¹ Milton's London was not greatly different from that of Spenser. "The London which he knew as a boy was the London of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson."² What, then, but that of Spenser? The gay city, the city of courtiers, the city of opportunity.

Spenser's age was one of political intrigue. Queen Elizabeth was the unifying, glorifying power of her country, but she was not unpossessed of whims and caprices of mind which led her to hold prejudices. She was a great ruler, but a human being who had foibles and weaknesses; she was loyal, honorable, and energetic on behalf of her country -- not always so on behalf of her supporters. We cannot blame her too much. It was an age when the security of the crown depended upon subtlety,

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1. J. C. Smith, E. DeSelincourt, The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, p. xi.
 2. F. L. Mader, R. H. Lovett, R. K. Root, British Poetry and Prose, p. 366.

connivance, shrewdness, and not always undecent methods. Only Elizabeth could have held her position. The fact that she did was invaluable to the future of the country, but this was at the expense of many individuals. Spenser was caught in this net of subtlety. He aspired for a court position, and, as the protege of the Earl of Leicester, who was a favorite of the queen, he stood a good chance of attaining his goal, but Leicester fell out of the Queen's favor, and Spenser's hopes collapsed. He dedicated his Shepheard's Calendar to Sidney, hoping to win by another avenue of approach, but that also failed. With The Faerie Queene he won Sir Walter Raleigh's approval and help, by means of which he secured a pension from the queen, but because of the animosity of Lord Burghley, the Prime Minister, he had difficulty collecting it. Spenser, hopeful from the time of his youth, was thus gradually disillusioned and disappointed.

Milton's life was no less influenced by political issues, and in like manner he was disillusioned. As a young man he went to Italy to pursue his studies, but he was recalled to England to serve his country in its time of need, for this was the time when Cromwell was rebelling against the tyrannous Charles I. Charles was executed in 1649 and the Commonwealth was established. Cromwell appointed Milton Latin Secretary, and he was then employed in writing political pamphlets for the cause of the new government. Imagine, then, his disappointment when Cromwell's dictatorship followed the Commonwealth. Had he

not been employed by Cromwell to stand against that very thing? He hated any kind of tyranny, that of a Cromwell as much as that of a Charles.

Both Spenser and Milton were extremely patriotic. Spenser glorified and supported his queen as Milton did his Cromwell.

Having noted that both men were entangled in the political net of their day, let us note also the religious situation and its effect in each case. In the Elizabethan Age the great struggle begun by Henry VIII to establish the Church of England was still going on, and Elizabeth had passed the Act of Uniformity, compelling the use of the Prayer Book of Edward. She had also issued an Act of Supremacy establishing the power of the crown over the Church. She proclaimed that no one should attempt to change the established church. The Catholics, who were the bugbear of her father, were not the only source of contention, however, for Elizabeth; in Mary's reign John Knox, a Scotchman, had adopted Calvinism and brought it back from the continent in the form of Presbyterianism. The sects which were to oppose each other in open conflict in the next century were already forming and breeding the seeds of trouble. When Spenser went to Cambridge, he formed a deep and lasting friendship with Gabriel Harvey. Harvey was a strong Puritan, and at Cambridge, "the hot-bed of those ecclesiastical controversies which harassed the minds of Elizabeth and her



advisers, the odium theologicum was peculiarly virulent."³ Spenser was in the midst of this turmoil, its effects are in his work, and it is not surprising that he was Puritan in his tendencies.

The age of Milton was the time when these smouldering coals of religious dissension burst into flame. Royalty sanctioned the Church of England. Then Charles lost his head, and Cromwell the Puritan was in power. Milton, the son of a man who had broken off relations with his Roman Catholic family in order to follow the Puritan faith, found it agreeable to work for causes with which he was in sympathy, but with the return of Charles II, he was forced to go into hiding. Puritanism was not in favor in Spenser's time; it was not of lasting favor in Milton's, and both poets were sympathetic with its tenets.

Spenser and Milton also had experiences in love which, though not parallel situations, were parallel in result. Although Spenser was happily married and Milton was not, both knew unhappiness in love, for the former, in his younger days before he knew Elizabeth Boyle, later his wife, was reputedly in love with a girl to whom he refers in The Shepheardes Calendar as Rosalind. In his poem he laments the fact that she will not have him and is saddened by it. Milton, more fortunate in winning the girl he wanted, married her but was

3. J. C. Smith, E. DeSelincourt, op. cit., p. 1x



unhappy in love and separated from her for three years. Reconciliation came later, but the point to be considered here is that both men knew disappointment in love.

We can readily see that these two sensitive idealists would be much disturbed by these mental and emotional conflicts in their lives, that their ideals would be much shaken, but that their firmness of purpose would lead them to cling to those ideals with tenacity. This they did, and they used musical, lyrical language to champion their ideals and sharp satire to defend them.

In other ways Spenser and Milton are alike. Both held similar views about poetry and education. To both the poet is a teacher. Spenser, in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh concerning The Faerie Queene, explains his purpose as "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline."⁴ Milton expresses the high function of poetry in his tract on education: "I mean not the prosody of a verse... but that sublime art (which shows) what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things."⁵ Both men believed that virtue is active, not passive. Milton's view that the passions within the soul of man and the pleasures round about us are "the very ingredients of virtue" is the same as that presented by

4. Robert Whitney Bolwell, The Renaissance, p. 136.

5. Edwin Greenlaw, "A Better Teacher Than Aquinas", Studies in Philology, XIV, p. 198.



Spenser throughout The Faerie Queene.⁶

The next point in question, however, is to discover to what extent these beliefs were parallel and to what extent Milton obtained them from Spenser. Greenlaw expresses his opinion that they were parallel beliefs.⁷ Be that as it may, possession of like beliefs in certain fields, such as education and poetry, certainly made a link between Spenser and Milton which might induce the latter to adopt further beliefs of his predecessor. At any rate, if it is a parallelism rather than an influence, the parallelism laid a basis for the influence. Further discussion of the ideas in The Faerie Queene as related to those expressed by Milton will be given in a more pertinent place..

Spenser's love of beauty and sensuousness made it difficult for him to be consistent in upholding the tenets of Puritanism. Although he theoretically sided with Piers, who represents Puritanism in the May Eclogue of The Shepheard's Calendar,⁸ his poetry bursts forth more buoyantly and spontaneously in the cause of Palinode, representative of the Anglican Church in the same Eclogue. Milton meets the same difficulty. Ascetic as he is, he revealed in a rash moment his love of the sensuous in "Elegy the Seventh Written in His

6. Ibid., p. 202.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 198.



Nineteenth Year" in which he revels in the physical beauty of a young girl. That he regretted this is proved by a note added later in which he explains that he wrote it at a time when he was "warped and twisted" in mind.⁹ Whom doesn't the spring warp and twist in mind? The reader delights in finding that these two Puritans, against their wills, are human in their susceptibilities. Yet perhaps that they owe their genius to this very quality for their depth and force is mellowed by it. Had they none of the sensuous element much of the imagery and color would be lacking.

Lastly, it should be noted that Boenser marks a transition between two great ages, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Therein is a part of his greatness. Likewise Milton marks a transition between the Renaissance and the Neo-Classic Period. The Middle Ages had many limitations - scarcity of verse forms, an undeveloped language, religious subject matter, no incentives for initiative, all of which resulted in no great literature, the one exception being Chaucer. The Neo-Classic Period likewise had limitations; it was a turning away from originality and exuberance, a set-back, although intended to be a perfecting, influence; it was a confinement to rules, to didacticism, and to imitation that thwarted greatness in literature. In contrast, the Renaissance held the key to many literary as well as "mode of living"

9. See The Poetical Works of John Milton, Oxford, Edition, p.577.

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 3, 1862.

2. The second part is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 10, 1862.

3. The third part is a report from the Secretary of the Interior, dated January 10, 1862.

4. The fourth part is a report from the Secretary of the Navy, dated January 10, 1862.

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23. The twenty-third part is a report from the Secretary of the War, dated January 10, 1862.

24. The twenty-fourth part is a report from the Secretary of the State, dated January 10, 1862.

secrets -- the exuberance of the age, the new discoveries and new way of thinking, the new confidence in man and his abilities, the new urge to hold and express original ideas or interpret old ideas originally all contributed to a vitality and vivacity never known in England before. Was it this common denominator, the Renaissance, which not only fostered these geniuses but aided Milton to understand and esteem Spenser? It was probably in large part responsible for their beliefs, but it was essentially the men's natures, lives, and beliefs, taken all together, that wove the mysterious chain between the two.



CHAPTER THREE

PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE INFLUENCE OF SPENSER ON MILTON

Having shown that the circumstances favorable for the influence of Spenser on Milton exist, it is more important now to show that it does exist. The problem from here on will be to present the proof. Many authorities give their support to the argument. Felix Schelling says: "We may note how here and elsewhere Spenser was Milton's guiding star."¹ Again, Hanford says: "Spenser was of value to Milton to help him interpret his genius to himself, in fostering his poetical idealism and his enthusiasm for purity, in teaching him how to give concrete literary embodiment to Platonism."² He says again, in referring to Milton; "The paramount influence remains, I believe, that of Spenser."³

John Dryden also makes an appropriate statement in "The Preface to The Fables." He says: "Milton was the poetical son of Spenser.--- Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original."⁴

Milton's own testimony is the best proof of any. In his "Areopagitica" he made the famous reference which has so often been discussed and on which Greenlaw has written an en-

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1. Felix Schelling, The English Lyric, p. 107.
 2. James H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 130.
 3. Ibid., p. 129.
 4. Edwin Greenlaw, op. cit., p. 197.



ture article;⁵ "our sage and serious poet Spenser (whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas)---"⁶ In opposition to Professor Raleigh, who does not recognize Spenser as a source of Milton,⁷ Greenlaw interprets this to mean that Milton had a deeper understanding of the greatness of his predecessor than anyone else since. He infers that, if Spenser is not recognized as a source, it is due to lack of comprehension.⁸

Greenlaw goes on to show the similarity of thought, purpose, and structure of Paradise Lost and The Faerie Queene, which, he says, could have no less in common at first sight. When these similarities are later brought out, it will be clear that Milton's remark cannot be cast aside as unimportant.

There is further proof of Milton's indebtedness to Spenser in other remarks of the poet. In the "Apology for Smectynnus" he says: "I betook me to those fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence renown all over Christendom."⁹ Hanford believes this is a reference to the

5. J. A. St. John, Milton: Prose Works, II, p. 68.

6. Edwin Greenlaw "A Better Teacher Than Aquinas", Studies in Philology, XIV.

7. "He hath confessed to me," said Dryden, "that Spenser was his original,"--an incredible statement unless we understand 'original' in the sense of his earliest admiration, his poetic godfather who first won him to poetry."--Prof. Walter Alexander Raleigh, Milton, p. 17.

8. Edwin Greenlaw, op. cit., p. 197.

9. James Hanford, op. cit., p. 275.



"solemn cantos" of the "sage and serious" Spenser, in fact so much so that he makes reference to it twice in A Milton Handbook.¹⁰

Milton again makes reference to Spenser in "Eikonoklastes" in which he attacks the evils of parliament.

He says: "If there were a man of iron, such as Talus, by our poet Spenser, is feigned to be, the page of Justice, who with his iron flail could do all this, and expeditiously, without those deceitful forms and circumstances of law, worse than ceremonies in religion, I say, God send it done, whether by one Talus, or by a thousand."¹¹ He thus directly mentions and shows approval of Spenser, and, more than approving, would call into action Spenser's idea of justice.

The first direct Spenserian influence probably came to Milton while he was still a youth at St. Paul's School. The headmaster there was Alexander Gill. In his book, Logonomia Anglicana, he quoted freely from Spenser in the section of grammatical and rhetorical figures. He was especially fond of Spenser, preferring him to Homer, and many of his examples of English usage were taken from The Faerie Queene. "Gill," says Harris Fletcher, "must have exercised considerable influence on the young Milton."¹² Of course this is easily understandable. What ardent and eager student, as Milton was, would not be influenced by a learned and wise teacher? Developing his love of

10. Ibid. "Milton says that the solemn cantos of the fables and romances of knighthood (evidently the Faerie Queene)--" p. 130 "Above all he is thinking of the 'solemn cantos' of the 'sage and serious' Spenser, who becomes henceforth a dominant influence in his poetic aspirations." p. 175.

11. St. John, Milton: Prose Works, I, p. 346.

12. Harris Fletcher, Milton: Complete Poetical Works, p. 72.



PART TWO
INFLUENCE ON THOUGHT



CHAPTER FOUR

IDEAS ABOUT POETRY

Spenser and Milton, as previously mentioned had similar ideas on poetry. Both thought the poet should be a teacher. They both had idealistic conceptions of education. Milton says in his tract on education that the end of learning is in "possessing our sould of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection".¹ The poet's function being to teach, he should, then, teach "true virtue". Spenser believed also that poetry should teach virtue. In The Shepheardes Calendar he says: "Oh what an honor it is to restrain the lust of lawlesse youth with good advice."² E.K.³ explains this line further: "This place seemeth to conspire with Plato, who in his first booke de Legibus sayth that the first intention of Poetry was of very vertuous intent."⁴ Is there any reason why both poets, diligent students of the classics, could not have received their conceptions of the function of poetry directly from Plato and independently of each other?

There was a reason, for Milton's poetry is character-

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1. Edwin Greenlaw, Studies in Philology, XIV, p. 198.
 2. Edmund Spenser's Shepheardes Calendar, October, L. 21.
 3. "E. K.", whose identity is unknown, added explanatory notes to the Shepheardes Calendar at Spenser's request.
 4. J. C. Smith and E. DeSelincourt, Works of Edmund Spenser, p. 458.



ized by a particular sort of Platonism, a Platonism influenced by certain other elements uncommon to it as such, yet the same sort as found in Spenser. We find in Spenser's "Hymnes" a curious mingling of Platonism and Christianity in an attempt to reconcile the two. In "An Hymne of Heavenly Love" he says:

"The high eternall powre, which now doth move In all these things, moved in it selfe by love."⁵

He goes further than the Biblical idea that God is Love, however, and identified Love with Beauty. In "An Hymne in Honour of Beautie" he says:

"But gentle Love, that loiall is and trew,
Will more illumine your resplendent ray,
And adde more brightnesse to your goodly hew,
From light of his pure fire--"⁶

and, again:

"So every spirit, as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the fairer bodie doth procure to habit in."⁷

This latter hymn was, of course, written earlier than the two on celestial love and beauty, but the fact that Spenser reprinted them at the time he published the last two shows that he did not repudiate them nor his Platonic idealism.

Hilton, too, expresses the Christian idea that God is love:

"The Son of God was seen
Most glorious, In him all his Father shon
Substantially express'd, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeared,
Love without end."⁸

5. Edmund Spenser's "An Hymne of Heavenly Love", l. 27-28.

6. "An Hymne in Honour of Beautie", l. 176-178.

7. Ibid., l. 127-130.

8. Hilton's Paradise Lost, III, l. 139-142.

The Platonic conception that the "heavenly light" generates beauty is also expressed:

"For Heav'nly mindes from such distempers foule
Are ever clear."⁹

Both poets, then, conceived a lofty Christian-Platonic ideal as the goal toward which to aim and the purpose of their poetry was to teach this ideal. Greenlaw sums it up nicely:

"The union of mysticism and the practical virtues, of the contemplative with the active life, -- is at once characteristic of Spenser and Milton."¹⁰

Again, Spenser has said poetry is superior to philosophy, for "So much more profitable and gracious is doctrine by ensample than by rule."¹¹ He carries out this practice in his work. The Faerie Queene supplies many examples, as when Redcrosse (Holiness) overcomes the hideous monster (Erreur).¹² Milton teaches "by ensample" also, and Spenser's influence in this respect is obvious, for Sin in Book Two of Paradise Lost is shown to us as a hideous monster very reminiscent of Spenser's "foul Errour".

Poetry, being virtuous in intent, therefore must be on lofty subjects. In the "Letter to Raleigh" it has been noted that Spenser said that his end was to fashion a gentleman or noble person. In the dedication to "The Hymnes" he says:

9. Ibid., IV, l. 118-9.

10. Greenlaw, Studies in Philology, XVII, p. 320.

11. Edmund Spenser, Letter to Raleigh, See R. Bolwell, The Renaissance, p. 127.

12. Faerie Queene, Book I, Canto 1.

"Having composed these former two Hymnes in praise of love and beautie,--which do rather suck out poyson to their strong passion than hony to their honest delight--, I resolved at least to amend, and by way of retraction to reforme them, making in stead of those two Hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestiall."¹³

Milton also believed poetry should be on lofty subjects, and thus he chose a lofty theme for his great epic. Milton was influenced by Spenser in choice of a subject for in the poem written to Mansus, he expressed a desire to write a national epic. It was to be about Arthur, as Spenser's national epic, the *Faerie Queene*, had been. He says:

"O, may my lot vouchsafe to me a friend so fine, one who knows so well how to honour the men of Phoebus, true men, if ever I shall bring back to my songs the kings of my native land, and Arthur, who set wars in train even 'neath the earth (i.e. Fairyland), or shall tell of the high-hearted heroes bound together as comrades at the peerless table, and - O, may the spirit come to my aid - I shall break to pieces Saxon phalanxes under the might of Briton's warring."¹⁴

This passage certainly refers to the *Faerie Queene*, for Redcrosse, in the political allegory, represented "the kings of my native land." Arthur "set wars in train" throughout the *Faerie Queene*, and Skeat, in his translation of Milton's "Manso", quoted above, notes that "'neath the earth" meant Fairyland.

When Milton later changed his theme to that presented in *Paradise Lost*, he wrote to his friend, Charles Diodati;

"I am hymning the King of Heavenly Seed, Bringer of Peace, and the blessed generations covenanted by the holy books,

13. J. C. Smith and E. DeSelincourt, *op. cit.*, p. 586.

14. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, Oxford Edition. "Letter to Mansus", Skeat's translation, p. 597.



and of the (heathen) gods, of a sudden crushed, at their own fames."¹⁵

By way of showing the theme of poetry should be thus lofty, he says again:

"Do not you look down on song divine, creation of the bard, for naught graces more finely than does song his heavenly source, his heavenly seed, his mind mortal in origin."¹⁶

Milton, then, if he turned from Spenser's theme of Arthur, none the less adhered to a theme which was lofty, and which, if we examine "An Hymne of Heavenly Love", was probably none the less influenced by Spenser. In the hymn, one of those written to compensate "naturall love" with "celestiall", Spenser tells of the creation of the angels and their fall, the creation of the angels and their fall, the creation of the world and of man, man's temptation and fall, and man's salvation through atonement by Christ.

Spenser believed that poetry was produced by divine inspiration. Of Cuddie's Embleme at the end of the October Eclogue of the Shepheardes Calendar, E. K. explains: "Hereby is meant, as also in the whole course of this Aeglogue, that Poetry is a divine instinct and unnatural rage passing the reach of comen reason."¹⁷ Milton says: "My soul is deeply stirred, is all aglow with mysterious impulses, the madness of inspiration and holy sounds stir me to my deeps within."¹⁸ The

15. Ibid., "Elegy the Sixth", Skeats' translation, p. 574.

16. Ibid., "Letter to His Father", Skeats' translation, p. 591.

17. J.C. Smith and E. DeSelincourt, op. cit., p. 459.

18. See The Poetical Works of John Milton, Oxford Ed., "Elegy the Fifth", Skeats' translation, p. 570.



link between Spenser and Milton is further shown to be close here, when Spenser says:

"For Bacchus fruite is frend to Phoebus wise"¹⁹

and Milton uses the same gods for reference:

"To these blessings we add artistry, and Phoebus diffused throughout the inndermost deeps of your soul; you, Bacchus, Apollo, Ceres favour as they favour no one else."²⁰

Again, Spenser says:

"And when with wine the braine begins to Sweate,
The numbers flowe as fast as spring doth ryse."²¹

And Milton: "Massie cups foam over with a rich flood of song,
and from the very wine jar you pour forth metres bottled
therein."²²

It is interesting also to observe that Milton refers to Chaucer as Tityrus,²³ the name given Chaucer by Spenser.²⁴ It is very likely that Milton was influenced in his ideas of poetry by Edmund Spenser.

19. Shepheard's Calendar, October, l. 106.

20. Poetical Works of John Milton, Oxford Edition, "Elegy the Sixth", p. 573.

21. Sh. Cal., October, l. 107-108

22. Poetical Works of John Milton, Oxford Edition, "Elegy the Sixth", p. 573.

23. Ibid., "Letter to Mansus", p. 596.

24. J.C. Smith and E. Desblinecourt, op. cit., Sh. Cal. Feb. Glosse, p. 426.



CHAPTER FIVE

PLATONISM

The Platonism in Spenser and in Milton is hard to separate from their other beliefs and conceptions. Something has already been said about their Platonic ideas in regard to their theories of poetry. This very fact might lead one to believe that much of Milton's Platonism came from Spenser, or from Plato through Spenser.

We have just seen that both Spenser and Milton tried to reconcile Platonism with Christianity. In this attempt they were alike, and Milton may have been influenced by the former. By isolating some passages from each poet, it was shown that they held the ideas in common that love is beauty and that all that is good is beautiful. In Spenser "gentle Love" will add "brightnesse to your goodly hew": in Milton the Son of God was "seen most glorious" because in his face appeared "love without end."¹ In Spenser: "For all that faire is, is by nature good"² and in Milton: "Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure" shone "in their looks Divine" for Adam was "the goodliest man of men since born his Sons, the fairest of her daughters Eve," before they had sinned.³

1. See Chapter Four

2. "Hymne in Honour of Beautie", l. 139.

3. Paradise Lost, Bk. IV, l. 291, 293, 323, 324.



In the "Hymnes" Spenser shows a progressive working of the soul of man to attain the heavenly kingdom. He says:

"Thrise happie man him hold,
Of all on earth, whom God so much doth grace,
And lets his owne Beloved (Sapience) to behold:--
It doth bereave Their soule of sense,
Through infinite delight, And them transport
From flesh into the spright."⁴

To reach this height, however, the soul of man has to pass up through the spheres, one of which is Plato's realm of Ideas, placed by Spenser above the Christian heaven: he begins by finding beauty and goodness in the physical, then in the spiritual, and finally reaching Sapience as the highest reward.

Milton not only expresses the same idea that the flesh goes into the spirit, but the progress is the same - through the spheres:

"Each (of all things) in their severall active
Spheres assigned,
Till body up to spirit work."

It begins with the physical:

"Flours and thir fruit Man's nourishment,"

and proceeds to the spiritual:

"By gradual scale sublin'd to vital Spirits aspire,
To animal, to intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fensie and understanding - "⁵

and finally the ultimate goal:

"Whence the soule Reason receives, and reason is
her being".

4. "Hymns of Heavenly Beautie", l. 239-241, 257-259.
5. Paradise Lost, V, l. 477-487.



Milton admired reason, and it is somewhat comparable to Spenser's Sapience.

Again, Spenser says, in true agreement with Plato, that all nature is a manifestation of God. Truth, love, wisdom, bliss, grace, doom, mercy, and might.

"-----unto all He daily doth display,
And shew himself in the image of his grace,
As in a looking glasse, through which he may
Be seene, of all his creatures vile and base,
That are unable else to see his face."⁶

Milton, too, believes that earthly forms are but the embodiment of Spirit in nature:

"What surmounts the reach Of human sense, I shall
delineate so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best, though what if Earth
Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein
Each to other like, more then on earth is thought?"⁷

Since Milton is so close to Spenser in the former respects, it is believable that this idea too, in Spenser's "Hymne" as were the others, was taken from Spenser.

Spenser follows Plato in his belief in two kinds of love. There is earthly love and heavenly love, or that of passion and that of reason. Thus the soul of man, in its progression upward to the highest sphere, must gradually turn from physical love to spiritual. His "Fowre Hymnes" develop this belief.

6. "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie", l. 114-117.

7. Paradise Lost, V, l. 571-575.



He says, in "Hymne of Love":

"But man, that breathes a more immortal mind,
Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie,
Seeks to enlarge his progenie.
For having yet in hid deducted spright,
Some sparks remaining yet of that heavenly fyre,
He is enlumined with that goodly light,
Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre:
Therefore in choice of love, he doth desyre
That seemes on earth most heavenly, to embrace,
That same is Beautie, borne of heavenly race."⁸

In the fourth hymne he makes a sort of summary:

"Beginning then below, with th'easie vew
Of this base world, subject to the fleshly eye,
From thence to mount aloft by order dew,
To contemplation of immortal sky."⁹

Milton also believes these tenets of Plato. It can be seen how close his interpretation of them is to Spenser's by certain similarities in their work. The instruction of Raphael to Adam in Paradise Lost, when it reaches the climax, deals with the difference between heavenly and earthly love and beauty:

"----- with honor thou maist love thy mate --
What higher in her societie thou findest
Attractive, human, rational, love still;
In loving thou dost well, in passion not,
Wherein true Love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, bath his seat
In Reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heav'nly Love thou maist ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause
Among the Beasts no Mate for thee was found."¹⁰

In like manner Guyon, in Book Two of The Faerie Queene, is warned by the palmer.

9. "Hymne of Heavenly Beautie", l. 22-25.
10. Paradise Lost, VIII, l. 577-594.



Because heavenly love can be attained through human love, Raphael continues, women were made fair:

"For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so,
An outside? fair no doubt, and worthy well
Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,
Not thy subjection."¹¹

Beauty is Goodness, as has already been seen, and Goodness is Beauty. Milton's Eve was beautiful because she was uncorrupted. Spenser's Una was beautiful because she was Truth. When Eve committed sin, she became rather despicable, and "in her cheek distemper flushing glow'd".¹² Satan, the fallen Lucifer, slowly loses the beauty of brightness as he sins more and more. In The Faerie Queene she who appears beautiful (Duessa) but is not good is revealed in all her ugliness. Spenser flavors his Platonism here with a note of his own: he shows that Beauty moves to compassion even a sinful person. When tears fell out of the "christall eyne" of lovely Florimell, the "vile Hag was much moved at so pitteous sight."¹³ Milton also adds this same touch to his epic. Satan, beholding the beauty of Eve, stood "stupidly good, of enmitie disarm'd."¹⁴

Plato believed that to love a beautiful person is to love beauty, and therefore goodness. Spenser had to reconcile his Puritanism here, for, since nature is a manifestation of

11. Ibid., L. 567-570.

12. Paradise Lost, IX, L. 387.

13. Faerie Queene, III, Canto 7, Stanza 9

14. Paradise Lost, IX, L. 465.



God, things of beauty in nature are a manifestation of Him, and to love a beautiful woman is to love God. He holds this belief in the "Amoretti":

"And that they (God's) love we weighing worthily,
May likewise love thee for the same againe:
And for thy sake that all lyke desire didst buy,
With love may one another entertayne."¹⁵

Milton, too, reconciled himself in this same way. The passages quoted on the foregoing page justifies the love of woman. Even his own life is consistent with this, for he turned from celibacy to the belief that celibacy was wrong, and had several children by his wife, Mary Powell. His attitude toward celibacy is shown in Paradise Lost:

"Adam from his fair Spouse, nor Eve the Rites
Mysterious of connubial Love refus'd:
Whatever Hypocrites austere talk
Of puritie and place and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to son, leaves free to all."¹⁶

Plato believed in the three-fold life; that of *philosophy* action, and that of passion. Spenser illustrates his like belief in The Faery Queene. Rederosse defends Una by deeds of action, but it is also necessary for him to be resuscitated by contemplation. He is taken to an old man whose name was "heavenly Contemplation; Of God and goodness was his meditation."¹⁷ He tells Rederosse:

"Then come thou man of earth, and see the way
(Contemplation)--
That never leads the traveler astray,

15. "Amoretti", Sonnet LXVIII.

16. Paradise Lost, IV, L. 742-747.

17. Faery Queene, I, Canto X, Stanza 46.



But after labours long, and end delay,
Brings them to joyous rest and endlesse blis."¹⁸

In Milton's Adam activity and contemplation are also combined:

"For contemplation hee and valour form'd"¹⁹

The third phase of life, that of passion, must be controlled by reason and will result in temperance, according to Plato. In Spenser's work Sir Guyon is the man who is striving toward temperance or self control; the Palmer is the abstract quality of temperance, and he warns Guyon against earthly love. Milton has almost the same plan. Raphael, sent by God to warn Adam, is pure and cannot be corrupted. On the other hand Adam is free and innocent, but also is subject to temptation. Again, the type of intemperance which is the subject of the first great crisis in Guyon's development is unworthy ambition and lust for power. In Paradise Lost the first great adventure in the epic is the fall of Satan, and the same form of intemperance is the cause of the fall. Greenlaw says that the last adventure of Guyon, in which he overthrows the Bower of Bliss, unquestionably influenced Milton's story of Adam's temptation and fall. He even compares Eve with Acrasia, "for to all intents and purposes Eve becomes the enchantress. She is, for the time being, transformed into Acrasia."²⁰

18. Ibid.

19. Paradise Lost, IV, l. 297

20. Edwin Greenlaw, Studies in Philology, XIV, p. 210.

Plato believed that, as temperance controls passion, so must wisdom govern philosophy, and courage action. When this is true, virtue itself is active, not passive, and both poets believed this. Again to quote Greenlaw, he says:

"Throughout the Faerie Queene are illustrations of Milton's view that the passions within the soul of man and the pleasures round about us are 'the very ingredients of virtue'; that the virtues of temperance (F. Q. Bk. V), and continence (F. Q. Bk. III & IV), specially named by Milton, are confronted with a profuseness of all desirable things and that the mind of man 'can wander beyond all limit and satiety unless controlled.'"²¹

Milton, when he specially named them, made reference to Spenser. In Elkonoklastes (See p. 16) he named justice as the kind in which Spenser believed. In Areopagitica he says

"What wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed. That virtue therefore which--knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers--is but a blank virtue--; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser (whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas) describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the Cave of Mammon, and the bowery of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain."²²

"Redcrosse is a good example of 'the true warfaring Christain' of whom Milton wrote," says Greenlaw. "Temperance in Spenser is Platonic, not Aristotelian.--This is followed by

21. Edwin Greenlaw, Studies in Philology, XIV, p. 202.

22. J. A. St. John, Milton: Prose Works, II, p. 68.

Milton." And, "In making the epic a fusion of the Christian dogma with philosophy ultimately Platonic, Milton is the poetical son of Spenser."²³ This statement seems believable considering the parallels shown in the two great works (The Faerie Queene and Paradise Lost), the fact Milton mentions the specific virtues illustrated by Spenser, and, most of all, that in doing so he refers to Spenser.

Other elements of Platonism are inseparable from other distinguishing characteristics of the two poets, but these will be discussed elsewhere.

23. Edwin Greenlaw, Studies in Philology, XIV, p. 211-212.

CHAPTER SIX

FREEDOM OF WILL

It seems consistent that an idealist like Spenser would believe in free will, for what chance is there to attain ideals or what inspiration to strive for them if all our lives are predestined? Surely a man who believed in the attainment of the highest realm through spiritual progression and trial of active virtue would believe in free choice. He did, as did Milton also.

Belief in free will, in the case of Spenser, was, in a sense, an outgrowth of his Platonic and idealistic beliefs. Milton accepted Platonism and idealism as accepted and modified by Spenser. It seems logical to think the influence might continue here.

Yet this is no proof. But if we examine the wording of the two poets in expressing their like views on this subject, we find it is surprisingly similar. Spenser states his belief:

"But he our life hath left unto us free,
Free that was thrall, and blessed that was band."¹

Milton says:

"I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Will they enthrall themselves;--"²

1. "Ryme of Heavenly Love", L. 133-134.

2. Paradise Lost, III, L. 124-5.

Knowing that Milton loved and knew Spenser thoroughly,³ it seems as if the use of the word "enthrall" would indicate a relationship.

Milton further says:

"Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith and Love,
Where onely what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would?--"⁴

This, then, is the reason why man has free will. Compare Spenser's line:

"He ought demands, but that we loving bee, --
Him (God) first to love--"⁵

This forms the core of Milton's theme for his great epic. He states his purpose is to "justify the wayes of God to men."⁶ Man's will is free, so he did not need to sin.

Adam and Eve sinned because they didn't resist temptation. God gave them grace because "The first sort (Angels) by their own suggestion fell," but "Man falls deceiv'd by the other first."⁷

In the Faerie Queene Spenser, by means of allegory, explains the ways of God to men. Redcrosse (Holiness) deserted Una (Truth) and thus fell into the hands of Duessa (Falseness). Duessa takes him to the House of Pride. Because he is dallying with her, he is unready to fight Orgoglio (Carnal Pride), and is conquered by him. Arthur (Magnificence) rescues him and he is reunited with Una. She takes him to the House of

3. See Chapter III.

4. Paradise Lost, III, L. 103-6.

5. "Looke of heavenly Love," L. 185, 186.

6. Paradise Lost, I, L. 26.

7. Id., III, L. 129-131.

Holiness where he repents. Mercie leads him to a place where he beholds:

"His (God's) chosen people purg'd from sinful guilt,
With pretious blood, which cruelly was spilt
On cursed tree, of that unspotted lam,
That for the sinnes of all the world was kilt."⁸

Thus man may stay with truth if he wills; if not, he falls into the clutches of falsehood. But reunited with truth, he finds the true ways of holiness again.

Eve, who is honest in deed and word, yields to Satan, learns evil, and is thus parted from truth. Because of his mercy God forgives her and Adam, through the atonement of Christ:

"As in him (Adam) perish all men, so in thee (Christ)
As from a second root shall be restored."⁹

Greenlaw says of this parallelism:

"It (Paradise Lost) shows indebtedness not only to the Book of Guyon but also to the Book of Redcrosse, and, in the latter, suggests both debt for incident and debt for the fundamental thesis of the justification of the ways of God to man and the promise of the 'greater Man' through whom redemption was to come."¹⁰

"An Hymne of Heavenly Love" sums up the entire story of the creation of heaven and the angels, the fall of Lucifer, the creation of the world and of man, the fall of man and his redemption through Christ. All these elements were facts of common knowledge and were frequently used, but we cannot ignore

8. Maerie Queene, I, Canto x, St. 57.

9. Paradise Lost, III, l. 129-131.

10. Edwin Greenlaw, op. cit., XVII, p. 320.

the fact that the method of handling them and the philosophy underlying them departs from conventionalism in Spenser and in a like manner in Milton. Spenser was too great to be imitated, Milton too great to be an imitator. But was not the latter great enough to understand his predecessor and apply this understanding to his own creative genius?

CHAPTER SEVEN

COSMOLOGY

Part of Milton's plan to justify the ways of God to men was to fit man into the scheme of nature. Milton believed nature was a manifestation of God, as we have seen, and in this respect he, like Spenser, is Platonic and Pantheistic. If, then, all the creations and creatures in nature are a part of God, where does man come into the scheme? This problem involves getting at the causes of things.

Milton did this. His sources were many -- Biblical, Classical, Medieval. Yet Greenlaw says:

"He (Milton) found in Spenser, and only in Spenser, precisely this conception of a philosophy of nature similar in all respects to his own, combined with a philosophy of conduct in which he also believed, and set forth in a form that met his own conception of heroic poetry."¹

The unique manner in which Spenser combines former ideas of the system of the universe into one of his own is found again in Milton: this would seem to be proof of Greenlaw's statement.

Spenser uses the Ptolemaic system of cosmology. In this system the earth is the center of the universe and is surrounded by the spheres of the moon, sun, and known planets, by the firmament containing all other heavenly bodies, by the crystalline sphere invented to explain the quinoxes, and,

1. Edwin Greenlaw, op. cit., XVII, p. 341.

lastly, by the *primum mobile* or "prime mover" to explain the motions of the heavenly bodies about the earth. Beyond and outside of this is the heaven of God and the angels, and underneath is hell.

This scheme is the conventional one, and Milton also used it. Spenser combined with it other elements which make his use of it unique. He adapted some of his ideas from Dionysius. Dionysius divided the angels into nine orders: seraphim, cherubin, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principdoms, archangels, and angels. Spenser means these nine orders when he speaks of the "trinall triplicities".² Certain parallels in Milton's work seem to indicate possible influence here. In Paradise Lost we find Satan addressing "thrones and Imperial Powers and ethereal Vertues."³ Christ addresses Thrones, Dominations, Principdoms, Vertues, and Powers,⁴ and Milton even refers to the "triple Degrees".⁵ But the angels rebelled and fell. God turned them out of heaven:

"Now seeing left a waste and empty place
In his wyde Pallace, through those Angels fall
Cast to supply the same ---"⁶

and man was created, according to Spenser. This idea of man being created to replace the fallen angels is not in the Bible; yet Milton states it also:

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2. "Hymne of Heavenly Love", L. 63.
 3. Paradise Lost, II, L. 310-311.
 4. Ibid., V, L. 601.
 5. Ibid., L. 747.
 6. "Hymne of Heavenly Love", L. 101-104.

"Who (God) justly hath drivn out his Rebell Foes
To deepest Hell, and to repair that loss
Created this new happy Race of Men--"7

Spenser believed the "most blessed Spirit; pure lampe
of light"⁸ had created the world out of a vast Chaos surrounding
it:

"For ere this world's still moving; nightie mass
Out of great Chaos --"9

This is Milton's idea also: Adam asks what moved the Creator,
elsewhere referred to as light",¹⁰ to build in Chaos. Spenser
calls night the "grandmother of all"¹¹ and Milton speaks of
"Blindest Night" and Chaos as "Ancesters of Nature".¹² The con-
ventional medieval idea was that the world was surrounded not
by chaos but by ether.¹³

Spenser believed that the creation was at the bidding
of Love. Love "gan to move out of his idle seate" and "through
the world his way he gan to take, the world that was not till
he did it make."¹⁴ In Milton the Son (Love) looked out from
Heaven upon the Abyss and then rode out into Chaos and created
the World.¹⁵

Chaos in Spenser was composed of four elements:

7. Paradise Lost, III, L. 677-79.
8. "Hymne of Heavenly Love", L. 43.
9. "Hymne in Honour of Love", L. 56-57.
10. Paradise Lost, III, L. 3.
11. Fairy Queene, I, Canto v, Stanza 22.
12. Paradise Lost, II, L. 894.
13. Parvin Greenlaw, op. cit., XVII, p. 345, footnote.
14. "An Hymne in Honour of Love", L. 66, 74-75.
15. P. L., VII, L. 192ff.

"The earth, the ayre, the water, and the fyre, --
Each against other, by all meanes they may,
Threatning their owne confusion and decay."¹⁶

Milton says:

"Into this wilde Abyss--
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus'dly -"¹⁷

Other writers used this old belief that these four elements were the basis of everything else which exists, but note that Milton uses "confus'dly", the very word Spenser had chosen to show how these elements mixed. Spenser, moreover, suggests that they "threaten" their decay; Milton says "perhaps" they are nature's grave.

Spenser believed that the inhabitants of this world, formed out of Chaos, were created free so that they could Love God but not by compulsion. This was a fairly common belief. A more personal feeling, however, is expressed in his sympathy for man in his sin:

"How then can sinfull flesh it selfe aspyre,
Sith purest Angels fell to be impure?"¹⁸

Milton expresses this same feeling in the words of Adam:

"-- though what thou tellst
Hath passed in Heav'n, som doubt within me move."¹⁹

Raphael has just told Adam about the fall of the angels, and

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- 16. "Hymne of Love", L. 78, 81-2.
 - 17. P. L., II, L. 910-14.
 - 18. "Hymne of Heavenly Love", L. 97-
 - 19. Paradise Lost, V, L. 553-4.

Adam means here that he has doubt in mankind's resistance to sin if angels themselves were so weak.

The place of habitation of Adam and Eve before their fall is the lovely Garden of Eden. Milton's description of it is not unlike Spenser's Bower of Bliss in Book Two of the Faerie Queene. Milton says:

" -- the rooffe
Of thickest covert was inwoven shade
Laurel and Mirtle, and what higher grew
Of firm and fragrant leaf."²⁰

Spenser's Bower of Bliss is:

" -- goodly dight
With boughes and braunches,, which did broad dilate
Their clasping armes"--
And all the margent round about was set
With shady Laurell trees, thence to defend
The sunny beames--"²¹

Milton describes Adam and Eve asleep:

"These lull'd by Nightingales imbraceing slept,
And on thir naked limbs the flourie roof
Show'rd Poses, which the Morn repair'd."²²

Spenser had also described Acrasia lulled by the birds and sleeping with her paramour:

"The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade,
Their notes unto the voyce attempred sweet; --
Upon a bed of Roses she was layd,--
The young man sleeping by her"²³

Milton's description is not only reminiscent of Spenser's in its reference to the trees, the birds, the roses, but he even

20. Paradise Lost, IV, L. 692-5.

21. F.Q., II, Canto 12, Stanzas 53, 63.

22. Paradise Lost, IV, L. 771-3.

23. F.Q., II, Canto 12, St. 71, 77, 79.

refers to the part of the Garden described as the "blissful Bower"²⁴ Spenser, on the other hand, suggests the Garden of Eden in describing Acrasia's Bower:

"More sweet and holesome, then the pleasaunt hill--
Or Eden selfe, if ought with Eden mote compare --"²⁵

and:

"There the most dainty Paradise on ground"²⁶

No wonder Milton called to mind this part of The Faerie Queene.

In Acrasia's lovely Bower there was only one season, and that one mild and warm:

"Ne suffred storme nor frost on them to fall,--
Nor scorching heat, nor cold intemperate
T'afflict the creatures, which therein did dwell,
But the milde aire with season moderate--"²⁷

Likewise in Milton's Garden of Eden:

" -- Universal Pan
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance
Led on th'Eternal Spring. --"²⁸

When Eve succumbs to temptation, mankind is driven from the Garden, whereas those who succumb to Acrasia she soon turns out as ugly beasts. No longer do they enjoy nature in its perfection. But man, the replacer of the fallen angels, is not destroyed; he is redeemed by the atonement of Christ. In The Faerie Queene the Palmer redeems the beasts although they remain bestial men, just as all the sons of Adam are

24. Paradise Lost, IV, L. 690.

25. Faerie Queene, II, Canto 12, St. 52.

26. Ibid., St. 58.

27. Ibid., St. 51.

28. Paradise Lost, IV, L. 266-8.

sinner by inheritance.

One has only to compare Spenser's and Milton's ideas of the entire universe as given in "The Hymne of Heavenly Love" and in Paradise Lost, and follow each writer through his conceptions of space to its smallest section - a part of the world of man, as given in the descriptions of the Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Eden, to see the similarity between the two. It seems quite possible that the seventeenth century Puritan was influenced by the great Renaissance poet in the matter of cosmology as well as in other things.



CHAPTER EIGHT

RENAISSANCE ELEMENTS

In Chapter Two it was pointed out that Spenser was a link between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Milton between the Renaissance and Neo-Classicism. It was suggested that the Renaissance elements in both may have been a common ground upon which they could meet.

Although the impetus for exploration and discovery, scientific inquiry and inventions, was new in Spenser's day, it was still relatively new in Milton's. People were eager to learn the truth; yet they did not know which theories to accept. Men's minds were probing to find which ones were most likely to be true.

Spenser shows his interest in the new discovered worlds in such lines of his poetry as the following:

"But let that man with better sence advize,
That of the world least part to us is red:
And dayly how through hardly enterprize,
Many great Regions are discovered,
Which to late age were never mentioned.
Who ever heard of th'Indian Peru?
Or who in venturous vessell measured
The Amazons huge river now found trew?
Or fruitfullest Virginia who did ever vew?"

"Yet all these were, when no man did them know;
Yet have from wisest ages hidden beene:
And later times things more unknowne shall show.
Why then should witlesse man so much misweene
That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?
What if within the Moones faire shining speare?"



What if in every other starre unseene
Of other worldes he happily should heare?"¹

Milton, in his use of the traditional Medieval scheme of salvation as the theme of the greater part of his poetry, scarcely is Renaissance in this respect. For this reason one is apt to overlook the fact that he did possess a scientific attitude, revealed if a close study is made in such works as Paradise Lost. Greenlaw says of him: "Paradise Lost gives indications that Milton's interest in the origin of things transcended questions of mere political advantage or conventional reference. It was a part of the intellectual movement of the time."² Book Eight, where Raphael is instructing Adam about the heavenly bodies, shows Milton to be scornful of the old astronomy rather than the new, as he is so often held to be. Raphael says:

"Or save the Sun his labour, and that swift
Nocturnal and Diurnal rhomb suppos'd,
Invisible else above all Starrs, the Wheele
Of Day and Night; which needs not thy boleeffe,
If Earth industrious of her self fetch Day
Travelling East, and with her part averse
From the Suns beam meet Night, her other part
Still luminous by his ray."³

This passage proves that Milton was not one of Spenser's "witlesse" men who "so much misseene that nothing is but that which he hath seene."

Like Spenser too, Milton shows interest in discovered

1. F.Q., II, Introduction, St. 2 & 3.

2. E. Greenlaw, op. cit., XVII, p. 327.



lands:

" -- which far
 "Outshon the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
 Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
 Shows on her Kings Barbaric Pearl and Gold."⁴

It is significant that, as Spenser's reference to South America is in the introduction to the second book of his great epic, so is Milton's reference to India in the same position in his epic, in the introduction to the second book.

Spenser's inference that the stars might be inhabited is paralleled in Milton, when he tells of Satan's flight toward earth:

"Through the pure marble Air his oblique way
 Amongst innumerable Stars, that shon
 Stars distant, but nigh hand seemd other Worlds,
 Or other Worlds they seemd, or happy Iles,
 Like those Hesperian Gardens fann'd of old,
 Fortunate Fields, and Groves and flourie Vales,
 Thrice happy Iles, but who dwelt happy there
 He stayd not to enquire!"⁵

Remembering that some of Milton's sources were the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the classic epics, we are compelled to remember also that scientific inquiry was in Biblical and classical times non-existent in literature, and that Spenser's epic was the only one written in the classic tradition before Milton's time which revealed the curious, exploring mind of the new era.

4. Facrie Queene, II, L. 1-4.

5. Paradise Lost, III, L. 564-571.

PART THREE

INFLUENCE ON STRUCTURE



CHAPTER NINE

STRUCTURE OF THE EPIC

Worthwhile thoughts and ideas ought to be expressed in a form adequate to convey them to the reader with the least possible loss. Spenser, in his letter to Raleigh, says that in The Faerie Queene he is going to portray "the twelve moral virtues as Aristotle hath devised."¹ To do this, what kind of a poem would The Faerie Queene have to be? Aristotle, in The Poetics, says that tragedy is "an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life", that character is "that which reveals moral purpose", and the poet must relate "what is possible according to the law of probability and necessity".² Epic differs from this only in that it can imitate several lines of action at once, and the irrational has wider scope because the person acting is not seen. Irrationality is justified when it is introduced because of the inner necessity.³ Spenser, because of the scope of what he wished to do, chose the epic as the most suitable form for his purpose, and, if we believe Aristotle's definition, he chose rightly.

Indeed Spenser did not imitate men, but actions and

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1. J.C. Smith, E. DeSelincourt, Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, p. xliii.
 2. J. E. Smith, E.W. Parks, The Great Critics, The Poetics, passim.
 3. Ibid.

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life, for his very characters were personifications of the virtues. In conformity to his belief that the virtues are active, these characters were constantly meeting trials. The way in which they met them revealed their moral purpose and was according to the law of probability, as, for instance, it is probable that temperance (Guyon) would resist sensual pleasure (Acrasia). The greatness of his plan made it necessary for Spenser to pursue more than one line of action at a time (e.g. Una's and Redcrosse's divergence of adventures) and also entrance of the element of the irrational (fairy devices and magic tricks). This irrationality was compelled, however, by the allegorical nature of his epic - by inner necessity.

Milton chose the epic too, for he was a lover of Homer and Virgil and wished to give England a poem of the same greatness as the Iliad had been for Greece, and the Aeneid for Rome. But Spenser's influence cannot be disregarded. Possessing many beliefs in common with Spenser, being an idealist as was Spenser, holding a high purpose as did Spenser, and declaring himself a great lover of Spenser, he would naturally have respect for the form Spenser considered appropriate for the portrayal of these beliefs, ideals, and purpose. Moreover, we have already seen that Spenser seems to have influenced Milton in choice of a subject and the subject was of the vastness and loftiness which only the epic

could encompass.

It will be of interest in our problem here to see how much Milton follows the precepts of epic poetry as Spenser seemed to follow them, those precepts held by Aristotle. Milton certainly imitates the actions and life of man as symbolized by our earliest ancestors, Adam and Eve, in one sense a type of personification. At the same time both Spenser and Milton individualize as well as universalize their characters. Secondly, Adam's and Eve's behavior reveals moral purpose, - they aspire toward God and live to praise and obey Him, Eve to adore Him in Adam. Yet the laws of probability make Eve, with her weaker intellect, succumb to Satan's temptation. Next, Milton pursues more than one line of action at the same time - that of Adam and Eve. Elements of irrationality, such as the flight of Satan through Chaos, irrational because it is beyond the conception of human reason, are justified because of their necessity. Naturally one could not have such a scene in a tragedy.

Basically Aristotelian, what other elements of the epic are comparable in these two poems which might throw a light on Spenser's influence on the actual epic structure of Paradise Lost? "The classical epic, as influenced largely by Virgil, developed certain devices which to a varying extent have been respected by all poets since."⁴ Some of these devices are:

4. W. F. Thrall, A. Hibbard, Handbook to Literature, p. 155.

beginning in medias res, the invocation of the muse, statement of the epic purpose, description of warfare and battles, use of the supernatural, speeches of the characters formal, epic catalogues, epic similes, and dignified and majestic language.

Spenser begins The Faerie Queene in the middle of things by having Una and Redcrosse already on their adventures, and not until Canto vii of the first book does Una tell Arthur, who comes to her aid, how it all began.⁵ Milton also begins in the middle of things, with the angels fallen and Adam and Eve created, and then Adam later tells Raphael, who has come to aid them by teaching them of God, of his creation. Both Spenser and Milton also use the device of a character relating what has gone before in a like manner to each other; in both their epics the aided character relates to the one who is aiding. Arthur too tells his story of his previous life, and Raphael tells of the fall of the angels and the creation of the world; so there is mutual imparting of information in both epics. But Una's story and Adam's are the more closely connected to the action of the epic than in progress; Arthur's and Raphael's the more remote.

There is an interesting point of similarity between the two poets in the invocation to the muse. Spenser departs from tradition by inserting autobiographical material:

5. Faerie Queene, I, vii, Stanza 43-47.

"Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
 As time her taught, in lowly Shepheards weeds,
 Am now enforst a far unfitter taske --
 Helpe then, O holy Virgin chiefe of nine."⁶

Milton likewise makes reference to his own life in his invocation:

" -- thee (the Muse) I revisit safe
 And feel thy sovran vital Lamp; but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
 To find thy piercing ray--"⁷

If Spenser had not made a precedent of autobiographical inclusions, Milton might not have dared to make such presumptions himself.

Spenser did not always invoke the same Muse. In the hymns in honor of love and beauty, with invocations the same as in an epic, he calls upon pagan gods, the god of Love and the goddess of Beauty, but in "An Hymne of Heavenly Love" he asks help from the "most blessed Spirit, pure lampe of light",⁸ the holy spirit of God. Milton calls upon Urania, the Greek muse, to inspire him although he explains that to him she means divine inspiration; nevertheless this is in accordance with classic epic tradition. But, like Spenser, he also calls upon the Christian God for help:

"And chiefly thou O Spirit that dost prefer
 Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me."⁹

6. *Faerie Queene*, I, 1, Stanzas 1,2.
7. *Paradise Lost*, III, L. 21-24, See also Book VII.
8. "An Hymne of Heavenly Love", L. 43.
9. *Paradise Lost*, I, L. 17-19.

Homer and Virgil know no such inspiration.

Even in the next epic characteristic, the description of battles, there are some startling likenesses between the two English poets which demand recognition. Spenser, in describing the fight of Redersace with the Giant, says:

"As when that diabolish yron Engin brought
In deepest Hell, and fram'd by Furies skill,
With windy Nitre and quick Sulphur fraught,
And ran'd with bullet round, ordain'd to kill,
Conceiveth fire, the heavens it doth fill
With thund'ring noise, and all the ayre doth choke,
That none can breath, nor see, nor heare at will,
Through smouldry cloud of duskish stincking smoke,
That th'onely breath him daunts, who hath escapt the
stroke."¹⁰

This lengthy simile seems undoubtedly to have influenced Milton's description:

"These in thir dark Nativitie the Deep
Shall yeild us, pregnant with infernal Flame,
Which into hollow Engines long and round
Thick-remmed, at th'other bore with touch of fire
Dilated and infuriate shall send forth
From far with thundering noise among our fees
Such implements of mischief as shall dash
To pieces."¹¹

And:

" - - - Sulphureous and Nitrous Foame
They found, they mingl'd, and with suttile Art,
Concocted."¹²

Milton even uses many of Spenser's very words, and his use of "pregnant" is suggestive of Spenser's use of "conceiveth".

10. *Fierie Queene*, I, vii, Stanza 13.
11. *Paradise Lost*, VI, l. 482-489.
12. *Ibid.*, l. 512-14.

The epic battles were usually of a three-day period. Redcrosse fought the dragon for three days; Satan's hosts fought the angels for three days. Spenser wearies us with a long, protracted fight for each of two days and then suddenly brings the battle to a swift close on the third. Milton does this exact same thing.

The number "three" is a favorite in epics for other uses than battles. In The Faerie Queene, Guyon suffered a three-day temptation of three phases, the temptation of wealth, of ambition, and of vanity. Mammon first offered him gold on the first day, then his daughter, who symbolized Ambition, on the second day, and vanity in the shape of golden apples on the third day. He describes the first two temptations at great length; the third he passes over rapidly.

In Paradise Regained Christ's temptation in the wilderness is of three days and of three phases, the same three as that of Guyon. Milton's source is the Bible, but in the Bible there are two conflicting sources, one in Mark and one in Luke. Milton chose to follow Luke, which is the same as that in Spenser. He chose it for the climatic progression, but he had seen it already developed in Spenser and probably this fact helped him to realize the dramatic power of this order. Also, as Spenser, Milton carries out to great length the first two days of temptation. He enlarges on the Bible story, and adds many smaller temptations to the one of Ambition.

The third and last one, that of Vanity, he treats very briefly, as did Spenser.

Guyon's temptation of vanity was in the form of apples, and Milton also used the apple as the forbidden fruit by which Adam and Eve sinned. Spenser, with his frequent and well-chosen use of the word "fair", applies it to the apple tree¹³ and Milton speaks of the apples on the Tree of Knowledge as "this fair Fruit".¹⁴ Although the apple tradition was an old one, the use of "fair" is an interesting parallel suggesting a possible influence.

In the use of the supernatural, Milton seems also to have drawn from Spenser. Britomart in The Faerie Queene represents the ideal chastity and therefore cannot be harmed. Although Gardante wounds her in the Castle Joyous, it is impossible that he harm her. She is a quality; an abstraction cannot be slain. Her wound is slight and seems merely to have been brought in for the aesthetic effect of the description. Milton's Satan also is wounded but, being a spirit, "th'Ethereal substance clos'd not long divisible",¹⁵ for evil, as a quality, cannot be mortally wounded. Another similar use of the supernatural, which Milton might easily have adapted from Spenser, is that of the magical vision. In The Faerie Queene Archimago

13. Faerie Queene, II, St. 56.

14. Paradise Lost, IX, L. 731.

15. Ibid., VI, L. 330-331.

(Hypocrisie) is able to call up a false vision into the mind of Rederosse while he sleeps. In Paradise Lost Satan likewise is able to invoke a false dream into the mind of Eve for the purpose of serving his evil plans the same as Hypocrisie had done. In The Faerie Queene men who joyed in evil ways of living had been turned to beasts in the Bower of Bliss. In Milton's Comus men are also changed to beasts.¹⁶

The Palmer's staff in The Faerie Queene could change the beasts from savage ferocity to meekness: Christ, in Paradise Regained, wandered among the wild beasts who "at his sight grew mild".¹⁷ Another device, the unmasking of an adversary by the magic touch of a heavenly messenger, is unique in Spenser and Milton.¹⁸ Hermes laid his "snaky-wreathed Mace"¹⁹ on the shoulder of the Titaness Matabilitie thus discovering who she is, and Ithuriel touched Satan with his spear, turning him from his disguise as a toad to his own form. The fruit by which Guyon was tempted was magical; "on earth like never grew"²⁰ the fruit in Milton's Garden of Eden had the magic power of Knowledge.

The epic speeches of Milton's characters, while powerful in their very originality, at the same time show Spenserian parallelisms, for the council in heaven in Paradise

16. Comus, L. 68-77.

17. Paradise Regained, I, L. 310.

18. Edwin Greenlaw, op. cit., XVII, p. 354.

19. Faerie Queene, VII, vi, Stanza 18.

20. Ibid., I, xi, Stanza 46.

Lost is similar to that in Spenser's cantos on Mutabilitie. Jove's speech to the heavenly powers is a summing up of the situation; he tells how earth's seed tried to assail heaven, how they were defeated, and how the Titaness is now seeking the same.²¹ In Paradise Lost God addresses His Son and sums up the case of Satan, how no power restrains the defeated fiend, how he has broken loose again and is aspiring for revenge on heaven.²²

Spenser makes use of the epic catalogue in Book One, Canto One of The Faerie Queene. It is a catalogue of the trees in the grove in which Redcrosse and Una took refuge.²³ Milton also has a catalogue in Book One of Paradise Lost; his is a catalogue of the gods in hell.²⁴

Spenser uses long epic similes usually beginning them with "as" and carrying them out in some detail. He often uses animals for comparison. In Book One²⁵ of the Faerie Queene he compares two fighters, Redcrosse and Sans Foy, to a Gryfon and a Dragon encountering each other. Milton also introduces his similes with the word "as" and frequently makes comparisons to animals. In Book Four²⁶ of Paradise Lost he tells us Satan is sneaking into Paradise and acting

21. Faerie Queene, VII, vi, St. 20, 21.

22. Paradise Lost, III, L. 20 ff.

23. Faerie Queene, I, i, Stanzas 8 and 9.

24. Paradise Lost, I, L. 376 ff.

25. Canto V, Stanza 8.

26. Line 183-187.

"As when a prowling Wolfe
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,
Watching where Shepherds pen their Flocks at eave
In hurdled Cotes amid the field secure,
Leaps o're the fence with ease into the Fould."

There is yet a closer relationship of the similes of the two poets than this somewhat doubtful one. It is the use by both of them of a comparison of their work to the progress of a ship. Spenser, at the close of Book One of The Faerie Queene, says:

"Now strike your sailes ye jolly Mariners,
For we be come unto a quiet rode,
Where we must land some of our passengers,
And light this wearie vessell of her lode.
Here she a while may make her safe abode,
Till she repaired have her tackles spent,
And wants supplide. ---"27

Milton, at the close of Book One of Paradise Lost, uses the same figure:

"And like a weather-beaten Vessel holds
Gladly the Port, though Shrouds and Tackle torn;"28

Note, that, although Milton could have used "whip" or "boat", he chose to use "vessel", the same word Spenser had used.

From these various personal, yet similar, characteristics in the epics of these two men, it can be seen that, although both Spenser and Milton followed the epic tradition, the individualistic treatment of it by Spenser is paralleled in Milton. The latter may have influenced in his structure of his epic by The Faerie Queene as well as the Iliad and the Aeneid.

27. Faerie Queene, I, canto xii, Stanza 42.

28. Paradise Lost, II, l. 1043-4.

CHAPTER TEN

THE PASTORAL

The pastoral has been defined as a poem treating of shepherds and rustic life.¹ It was used by the classic writers as a conventional poetic form in which the poet wrote of his friends and acquaintances as though they were shepherds in rural life. Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar and Milton's Lycidas are outstanding examples of the pastoral.

Spenser takes the opportunity, under the guise of the shepherd cloak, to lambaste the Anglican Church. His satire is sharp and stinging:

"Those faytours little regarden their charge,
While they letting their sheepe runne at large,
Passen their time, that should be sparsely spent,
In lustihede and wanton meryment.
Thilke same bene shepherds for the Devils stedd,
That playen, while their flockes be unfedde.
Well is it seene, theyr sheepe bene not their owne,
That letten them runne at randon alone.
But they bene hyred for little pay
Of other, that caren as little as they,
What fallen the flocke, so they han the fleece,
And get all the gayne, paying but a peece."²

Milton, too, takes his dig at the Anglican clergy by means of the pastoral form. Like Spenser, he compares them to shepherds who neglect to see that their flocks are properly taken care of and pass their time in idle pleasures:

1. W. F. Thrall, A. Hibbard, The Handbook to Literature, p. 303.
2. Edmund Spenser, The Shepherd's Calendar, May eclogue,
L. 38-50.

"Anow of such as for their bellies sake
 Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
 Of other care they little reek'ning make,
 Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
 Blinde mouthes! that scare themselves know how to
 hold
 A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least
 That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs!
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
 And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
 Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched stray,
 The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed, ---"

The similarity here is noticeable enough to suggest that Sponser may have been Milton's guide, for expressing a like belief.

In the November Eclogue Colin, the shepherd, laments the death of Dido. He comes to the conclusion that her death is not to be mourned, for she is in heaven among the saints. Milton's poem is an elegiac pastoral to Edward King and the shepherd, lamenting his friend Lycidas, concludes, as did Colin, that he should not weep for him, for he, like Dido, is entertained now by all the saints. Although it is a characteristic of all elegies to end with an attitude of happiness on the part of the poet, because he knows that the deceased is blessed, the wording of the two poets is similar enough here to be a possible influence.

In rustic description also, a passage in Lycidas seems to parallel one in the April Eclogue. Both poets make

a list of flowers, and in that list both mention daffodils and cowslips.

In Colin Clout Comes Home Again Hobbinal, one of the shepherds, tells Colin how much he has been missed:

"Whilest thou wast hence, all dead in dole did lie:
The woods were heard to waile full many a nythe,
And all their birds with silence to complaine:
The fields with faded flowers did seem to mourne,
And all their flocks from feeding to refraine:--"⁴

Milton expresses how much Lycidas is missed in a similar passage:

"Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, the desert Caves,
With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.
The Willows and the Hazel Copces green,
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft layes.
As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrop wear,
When first the White thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear."⁵

The sense of loss of a friend is, in both cases, expressed in pastoral phrasing to the very details.

Another interesting parallel is found in Milton's famous description of the idyllic pastoral life:

"Come, and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastick toe,
And in thy right hand lead with thee,
The Mountain Nymph, sweet Liberty:--"⁶

These lines call to mind Spenser's:

"And lightfote Nymphes can chace the ling'ring night"⁷

4. Colin Clout Comes Home Again, L. 22-26.
5. Lycidas, L. 39-48.
6. Illegato, L. 33-36.
7. Engl. Calendar, June, L. 26.

for Milton's lines invoke the light-footed Nymph as he is about to begin his description of a happy day. Also, he begins by dismissing Melancholy, just as Hobbinol advises Colin to "forsake the soyle, that so doth thee bewitch:" where "angry Gods pursue from coste to coste."⁸

Milton knew the pastorals of Fletcher and Browne well, and without doubt was influenced by them also, but Schelling says of this matter: "Lycidas harks back, once more through many pastoralists, to Spenser."⁹

8. Ibid., June, l. 17, 14.

9. Felix Schelling, The English Lyric, p. 108.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ALLEGORY: OTHER SIMILARITIES

Allegory is a form of literature which was popular in the Middle Ages. It is "the treatment of a subject, an action, or a description in which the objects or incidents or people are presented through personification or symbolism."¹ Spenser adapted it to his uses within other literary forms. We have already seen many examples of his allegory.

The whole of The Faerie Queene is allegorical. Woven through it are three main threads of symbolism - religious, political, and moral. We have seen that Guyon is man striving for temperance, whereas the Palmer is Temperance; and, Adam corresponds to Guyon, Raphael to the Palmer. Archimago is the personification of evil in Spenser; Satan in Milton. Allegory is a particularly effective manner of "teaching by ensample" and since both Milton and Spenser believed they should do this, Milton looked for these "ensamples" in Spenser.

There are other passages of allegory in Spenser which Milton seems to adapt to his own uses. Spenser's description of "Foule Errour" shows a definite influence upon Milton's description of Sin. Redcrosse saw:

1. W. F. Thrall, A Hibbard, op. cit., p. 9.

" --- the ugly monster plaine,
 Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
 But th'other halfe did woman's shape retaine,
 Most lothson, filthy, foule, and full of vile
 disdain.
 And as she lay upon the durtie ground,
 Her huge long taile her den all overspred,
 Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound,
 Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred
 A thousand young ones, which she dayly fed,
 Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, each one
 Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favoured:
 Soon as that uncouth light upon them shone,
 Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone."²

Milton's creature almost seems to be the very same one as
 Spenser's.

And Satan, arriving at the Gates of Hell, sees Sin:

" -- Before the Gates there sat
 On either side a formidable shape;
 The one seemed Woman to the waste, and fair,
 But ended foul in many a scaly fould
 Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
 With mortal sting: about her middle round
 A cry of Hell Hounds never ceasing bark'd
 With wide Cerberian mouths full loud, and rung
 A hideous Reel: yet, when they list, would creep,
 If aught disturb'd thir noyse, into her womb,
 And kneel there, ----"³

Again, Amoret in The Faerie Queene is "bounden fast"⁴
 before the Enchaunter who persecuted her in order to force her
 to do his will, but she will not. She represents Chastity and
 he is Lust. Likewise the Lady in Milton's masque, Comus, sits
 before Comus, powerless to move and yet not yielding to him.
 The Lady, as her brothers tell us, represents Chastity like

2. Faerie Queene, I, i, Stanzas 14 and 15.

3. Paradise Lost, II, l. 648-658.

4. Faerie Queene, III, xii, Stanza 30.

Amoret; Comus is Lust. The rabble of sexual monsters in the Palace of Comus:

"Soon as the Potion works, their human count'nance
Th'express resemblance of the gods, is chang'd
Into sen brutish form of Woolf, or Bear
Or Cunce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,
All other parts remaining as they were ---
To roule with pleasure in a sensual stile."⁵

is not unlike those in the Bowre of Eliss:

"Said he, These seeming beasts are men indeed,
Whom this Enchauntress hath transformed thus,
Whylome her lovers, which her lusts did feed,
Now turned into figures hideous."⁶

Milton often seems to have followed Spenser in the matter of detail as well as general form. We have seen in many places how Milton, in a similar passage, uses the same words as Spenser, such as "fair" to describe the apples in Eden.

Spenser has been called by Greenough the "most eminent of all archaizers."⁷ Milton was not particularly fond of archaisms, but nevertheless there were several in his vocabulary: e.g., "fiore", "areed", "wons."⁸ The same words, with slightly different spellings, can be found in Spenser's work: e.g., "fiory", "arede", "wonne."⁹ Hanford says, "Spenser, of course, uses archaisms much more persistently than Milton, with whom the practice is in part at least a

5. Comus, L. 68-72, 77.

6. Faerie Queene, II, xii, Stanza 35.

7. L. Greenough, J. Kittredge, Words and Their Ways in English Speech, p. 118.

8. J. N. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 266.

9. Complete Poetical Works of Spenser, Oxford Ed., Glossary p. 825-45.

survival of the Spenserian tradition in poetry."¹⁰ Both Spenser and Milton also make use of the archaic prefix "y" to indicate the past tense: e.g., "y-cladd,"¹¹ and "ycleap'd."¹²

Spenser had a fondness for inventing names which were symbolic. Braggadochio, for example, he formed from "brag" and the Italian termination,¹³ "a cowardly boaster". Milton's invented name, Pandemonium, is formed in like manner from Greek and Latin to mean "all demons".

These parallelisms in wording as well as in form imply the possibility of a greater influence of Spenser on Milton than the general influence which Milton has himself acknowledged.

10. Hanford, op. cit., p. 67.

11. Faerie Queene, I, I, Stanza 1

12. D'Aleppo, L. 12.

13. J. Greenough and G. Kittredge, Words and Their Ways in English Speech, p. 347.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SUMMARY

The first impression one gets of the poetry of Spenser and Milton is that no two men could be more opposed to each other in their way and type of writing. Spenser, who lived in an age when the monarchy blazed in glory, wrote descriptions of pageantry, flattery of the queen and her court, passages full of sensuousness, color, and imagery, diffuse and profuse fantasy. Milton lived in an age quite the opposite. The monarchy was in disfavor and Cromwell was enforcing Puritan discipline of mind and behavior. Instead of love of fantasy and delight in the pomp and ceremony of the court, instead of sheer sensuous appeal, Milton wrote of the weighty problems of theology with careful deliberation. The difference in the times, the difference in the circumstances, seems to have set these two men a world apart.

Yet, if we but remember that Spenser satirized as well as glorified the court, that he had a deep interest in religious as well as political problems which shows itself if we dig below the surface of his work, and that he excused his sensuality as necessary for aesthetic contrast,¹ we find him

1. See Faerie Queene, Book II, xli, Stanza 66.

nearer to Milton in beliefs and expression of those beliefs. If, on the other hand, we remember that Milton, serious though his purpose was, used great imaginative power in depicting the story of the Bible, that he knew the value of appeal to the senses when he described the Garden of Eden, that even he sometimes employed sensuality² for purposes of artistry, we realize he is not so remote from Spenser after all.

We study further, and we see that the very essence of the work of the two poets is the same. The same purpose, the same ideals, are the foundation of their poetry. Tracing the similarity further, we find their manner of expressing themselves is the same, their technique the same, and even the matter of wording is often the same. The fact that they each appear unique in literature is a tribute to the genius of each, to that of Spenser because he was too great to be copied, to that of Milton because he knew the values in Spenser without attempting to copy.

Greenlaw says that Milton found every element of the material he wished to use in Paradise Lost already in Spenser's poetry.³ I believe it is safe to carry this statement further; I believe that Milton found every element of material he wished to use in all his poetry in that of Spenser.

2. See Paradise Lost, IX, L. 1034ff.

3. Greenlaw, op. cit., XVII p. 359.

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE POETRY OF EDMUND SPENSER
UPON THE POETRY OF JOHN MILTON

ABSTRACT

Scholars commonly assert that Edmund Spenser, the great poet of the Elizabethan Age, exerted influence upon John Milton, the Puritan poet of the next century. The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a study of this influence, the reasons for it, and the kind and extent of it.

There were certain parallels in the natures, lives, and beliefs of these two men which are possible grounds for a close sympathy between them. They both had extremely sensitive natures, both were well acquainted with the city of London, both lived in periods of history that were politically difficult, and both knew unhappiness in love. Both were much disturbed by these mental and emotional conflicts in their lives. Both were idealists, and both were disillusioned. These parallels wove a mysterious chain between the two poets.

There is much proof to show that the influence of Spenser on Milton does exist. Felix Schelling, James Hanford, and John Dryden make statements that Spenser's influence was of great importance. Milton's own testimony is the best proof. He acknowledges his debt to Spenser in "Areopagitica" and in "Apology for Smectymnus". He refers to him also in "Eikonoklastes". This influence was expressed in Milton's poetry in thought and in form.



Some of the ways in which Spenser seems to have influenced Milton in thought are in his ideas about poetry, in his Platonism, in his belief of freedom of the human will, in his cosmology, and in his Renaissance ideas. Both Spenser and Milton believed that it was the duty of the poet to teach. They both conceived a lofty Christian-Platonic ideal as the goal toward which to aim, and the purpose of their poetry was to teach this ideal. They believed poetry must be virtuous in intent and on lofty subjects. They believed it was produced by divine inspiration.

The Platonism of Spenser and Milton was, as has already been suggested in the preceding paragraph, modified by Christian doctrines. Spenser and Milton believed that love is beauty and that all that is good is beautiful, but they also believed that God is Love and that beauty emanates from Him. They believed in the Platonic conception of the spirit working upward above the physical to a realm of its own, and in the conception of two kinds of love, earthly and heavenly. Plato believed in the three-fold life of philosophy, action, and passion. Spenser and Milton illustrate a like belief in this three-fold life in which temperance must control passion, wisdom must govern philosophy, and courage govern action. Other elements of Platonism are inseparable from other distinguishing characteristics of the two poets.

Spenser and Milton also believed in free will. The similarity of wording in expressing this idea suggests that Mil-

ton may have been influenced in this belief by Spenser.

Spenser's cosmology is a mixture of the beliefs of Ptolemy, Dionysius, and the Bible. He uses the Ptolemaic system of the earth as the center of the universe, but adapts the nine orders of the angels from Dionysius. Milton expresses a like mixture of ideas. Both suggest that the world was built out of Chaos at the bidding of Love. The descriptions of Spenser's Bower of Bliss and Milton's Garden of Eden on this created world are comparable. It is quite possible these parallels are partly due to Spenser's influence.

Spenser might be considered a link between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and Milton between the Renaissance and Neo-Classicism. The Renaissance elements in both might have been a common ground upon which they could meet. They both show interest in new discovered lands, scientific curiosity as to the origin of things, and beliefs in the possibility of habitation on the stars. Spenser's epic was the only one written in the classic tradition before Milton's time which revealed the curious exploring mind of the new era.

Spenser also seems to have influenced Milton in the structure of his work. In their great epics, The Faerie Queene and Paradise Lost, both poets follow the epic tradition, but Spenser uses a certain amount of originality in treatment which is found also in Milton. Both introduce autobiographical material into the invocation to the muse, Both call upon two types of muse, a pagan one and a Christian one. There is a noticeable likeness

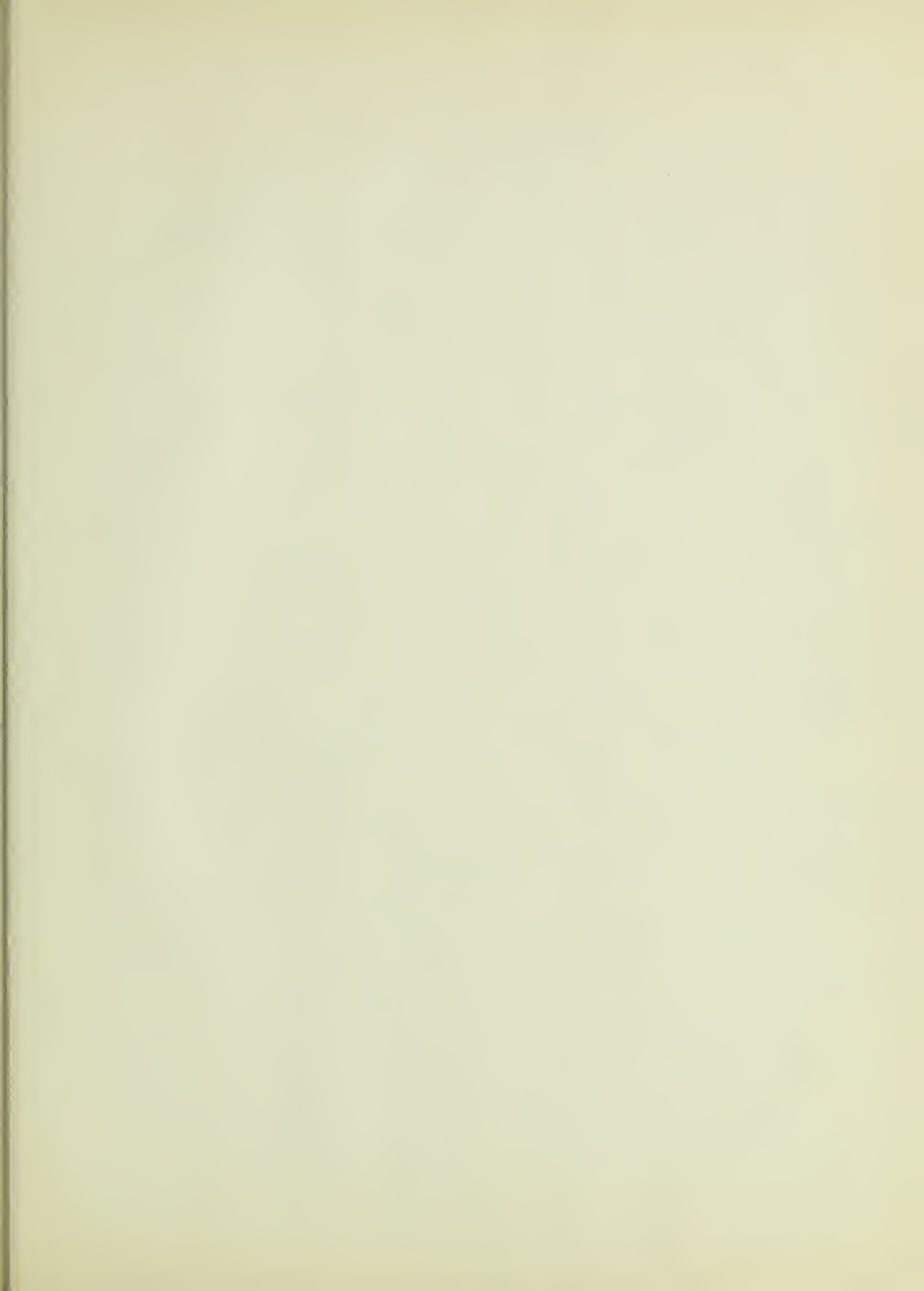
in the description by the two poets of a battle scene, and Milton's treatment of the three day temptation of Christ in the wilderness in Paradise Regained is much like Spenser's handling of Guyon's temptation in the Cave of Mammon. There are similar uses of the supernatural in the work of both poets, and both make use of a like simile at the close of the first book of each of their great epics. These parallels seem to indicate that Milton may have owed a debt to Spenser, as well as to Virgil and Homer, for his epic.

Another form employed by both poets is the pastoral. There are, in Milton's Lycidas, passages of description and of satire which parallel passages in Spenser's Shepheardes Calendar. Felix Schelling states his belief that Lycidas can be traced back to Spenser.

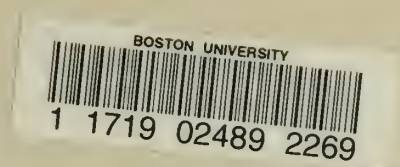
Spenser and Milton both make use of allegory. Milton's description of Sin and Death in Paradise Lost is not unlike Spenser's depiction of "foule errour" in The Faerie Queene. Both poets used archaisms, invented symbolic names, and used similar connotations of words. These parallelisms imply the possibility of extended influence in detail as well as in general structure and in thought content.

In both Spenser and Milton can therefore be found a similarity in form and a common acceptance of such beliefs and attitudes as scientific curiosity, Platonism, Puritanism, and Renaissance love of beauty.









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